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DRAFTED: P/E:APYOTT
CLEARED: DCM:MRATNEY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DOHA 001265

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/21/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [IS](#) [LE](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: QATARI AMIR: AFTER ARAB "VICTORY," TIME TO TALK
PEACE

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Qatari Amir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani made the first visit to Lebanon by an Arab leader after the end of the recent fighting. Following a tour of bombed-out areas of southern Beirut, he held a press conference with Lebanese President Lahoud carried live on Al Jazeera, in which he said "the Lebanese people and the Lebanese resistance have achieved the first Arab victory -- something we had longed for." He appeared to criticize talk of disarming Hizballah, saying "to ban weapons for Lebanese while allowing them for the Israelis makes Lebanon an easy target for Israel at any time, which is unacceptable." Responding to questions about Syria's role in the region, the Amir said President al-Asad asked him to carry an invitation to Prime Minister Siniora to visit Damascus at any time. Syria is ready for peace, the Amir said, and "the faster we move toward peace, the better it is for the region."

¶2. (C) In a meeting with Ambassador August 22, Mohamed al-Rumaihy, Assistant to Qatar's Foreign Minister, said that the Amir's statements were a "reaction to what happened on the ground" and were necessary to restore a degree of Arab pride after multiple losses in wars against Israel and needed as a precursor to broader negotiations for a regional peace. Rumaihy said that Israel had bombed without regard for the Lebanese government or people, and Arab public opinion on this point was important. Regarding the Amir's use of the word "resistance," Rumaihy tried to suggest that this referred not to Hizballah but to "resistance against attack; defending one's country."

¶3. (C) Rumaihy said the war had not achieved anything for either side - no progress had been made. However, it is important to "tell people they got what they want" and then push for a wider peace. "Our goal is to help the parties get to peace, and we want Israel to help," he said.

¶4. (C) Rumaihy said that Qatari officials believe now is the time to push for a wider peace in the region. "Egypt will approach the Israelis, and Qatar will approach the Israelis," he said. This is a component, he said, of an Arab League initiative to revive the Middle East peace process. Rumaihy said that Qatar is more optimistic now because it was able to achieve certain goals on behalf of Arab states in the United Nations Security Council. He also said Qatar hopes the U.S. would also support an Arab League-led initiative in the UN.

¶5. (C) Rumaihy's remarks were paralleled by those of an official in the Amiri diwan who told Poloff August 22 that that the Lebanese had not won a victory and that Hizballah is a danger because it is acting as a "state within a state." But for humanitarian reasons, the Amir needed to say what he did. It was also likely that he was personally affected by sights of the devastation. But he noted that the Amir sent signals to other parties - openly admitting that he had obtained Israeli permission to land at Beirut's airport, for example. The Diwani official said that the Amir's mission was to pave the way to a wider peace. He paraphrased the Amir's message: "You've won; now it's time for peace."

COMMENT

¶6. (C) The Amir arrived in Beirut after visits to Cairo and Damascus, and his objective appears to be reconciling Arab states in preparation for a Qatari or Arab League peace initiative. While the Amir's comments were no doubt a sincere reflection of his feelings after a moving visit to Beirut's southern suburbs and a response to popular anger at Israel, we believe his main focus is on turning the page on this episode and moving toward negotiations on a broader Middle East peace - negotiations in which Qatar wants to be a major player.
UNTERMEYER